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SUBJECT: COM URGES MODERATE KOSOVO SERB LEADERS TO ENGAGE
IN STATUS NEGOTIATIONS

REF: (A) PRISTINA 352 (B) PRISTINA 614

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. During introductory meetings with moderate Kosovo Serb leaders Oliver Ivanovic, Bishop Teodosije and Father Sava, COM echoed recent comments by Ambassador Wisner about the importance of active and direct engagement in status negotiations during the coming weeks. Ivanovic, Teodosije and Sava all expressed gratitude for Wisner's candor, and criticized Belgrade for taking an "unrealistic and obstructionist" approach to status negotiations. Ivanovic claimed he is in the process of registering his own new political party in Kosovo. Teodosije said UNOSEK's proposal for protection zones for the fifteen most important Serb cultural heritage sites in Kosovo was more reasonable than Belgrade's proposal for forty sites, which he said would cover more than half of Kosovo. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) On July 31, COM urged Oliver Ivanovic, leader of the Serbian List for Kosovo and Metohija (SLKM), as well as moderate Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) leaders Bishop Teodosije Sibalic of Lipljan and Father Sava Janjic, to engage in the final status process during these crucial final weeks of intensive negotiations. COM said that now is the time when moderate Kosovo Serbs must engage to the fullest extent possible in order for their ideas to be considered. She encouraged them to continue to submit any proposals directly to the Kosovo Albanian negotiating team or to the USG. She also urged them to help build a Kosovo in which Kosovo Serbs will choose to live regardless of status. Ivanovic, Teodosije and Sava all agreed that the coming weeks were critical, and lamented that Belgrade's interests did not always coincide with those of Kosovo Serbs.

¶3. (SBU) Ivanovic told COM that he has filed registration documents with the OSCE to create a new political party, which he hopes will unify Kosovo Serbs and enable them to

influence policy in Kosovo. Unlike the current SLKM, he said, his new party would not be directly tied to Belgrade political parties, although he claimed to have the support of the Belgrade-based Social Democratic Party (SDP), Nebojsa Covic. He fretted that Kosovo Serbs were completely disorganized and averred that Belgrade has long prevented the establishment of local political elites. He reiterated the intent of the SLKM Kosovo assembly members to return to Pristina institutions "as soon as possible," ideally before status is finalized. However, he caveated heavily, saying that the SLKM is weak and he still needs at least some low-profile support from Serbian President Boris Tadic and from fellow SLKM member Goran Bogdanovic (the Kosovo representative of Tadic's Democratic Party (DS) and a member of the Belgrade status negotiating team) in order to return to Pristina's Provisional Institutions of Self-Government (PISG).

¶4. (SBU) Ivanovic expressed concern about possible political tension in Kosovo this fall, and said the U.S. should use its influence with Kosovo Albanian leaders to prevent violence. "Some people," he noted, wrongly believe that threats will improve their negotiating position. Ivanovic agreed that a division of Kosovo would be disastrous for the 60% of Kosovo Serbs who do not live the north, and he criticized Serbian Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica directly, saying that responsible leaders should have courage and take more initiative.

¶5. (SBU) Small but visible infrastructure improvements on the ground, Ivanovic argued, would help Kosovo Serbs through these uncertain times if implemented now; current urgent needs included an access road to Laplje Selo (outside Pristina) and a small bridge in Ranilug (Kamenica municipality). He asked for opportunities to align the SLKM with these projects, noting that the coalition needed to show

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Kosovo Serbs there can be positive results from their participation in institutions. He also complained that Pristina leaders make encouraging statements about promoting multi-ethnicity, but then fail to follow through with appropriate action. He gave a recent example in which he successfully urged a Kosovo Serb engineer from Mitrovica to apply for a position with the Kosovo Ministry of Transport, but said the applicant never even received a response to his application.

¶6. (SBU) At Decani Monastery, Teodosije and Sava told COM that they and the SOC will stay in Kosovo regardless of the outcome of status negotiations, and they are therefore able to take a more realistic approach to finding compromise solutions. Teodosije said he is pleased with UNOSEK's proposal for protection zones for the 15 most important Serbian cultural heritage sites in Kosovo, but said that the church wants several more sites that were active monastic communities prior to 1999 to be added to the list as a sign of goodwill. Sava said that these sites meet the established criteria, which include functionality (the nature of the site as a church or monastery), environment (urban or rural), visibility (the zone should include what can be seen from the site), and the degree of vulnerability.

¶7. (SBU) Teodosije said that he urged Belgrade negotiating team members who continue to insist on special protections for over 40 sites (consisting of over half of Kosovo) to "open their eyes" to the reality of the situation. He expressed concern that Kosovo Albanians continue to see Serbian heritage sites as "Trojan horses" of the Serbian state, and said that Belgrade's proposals do nothing to calm such fears. Father Sava gave COM several satellite images of valley surrounding Decani Monastery, color-coded to compare the current UNMIK protection zone (Ref A) with the Belgrade proposal and with monastery lands prior to WWII. He said that the next issue to be resolved is the structure and role of international commissions which will manage protection

zones around the selected sites, noting that without adequate international monitoring, the zones themselves would offer little protection.

¶18. (SBU) Teodosije praised Serbian President Boris Tadic, with whom he recently spent three hours at a summer camp for multi-ethnic refugee children in Serbia. Teodosije said that Tadic completely shared his own views on decentralization and the protection of cultural heritage. Teodosije and Sava were also clear on the need to engage Kosovo Albanians. However, Sava admitted they are limited by the parameters set by the church hierarchy in Belgrade, and said he was even worried that Teodosije might be transferred away from Decani during the next Synod in November (Ref B).

¶19. (SBU) COMMENT. Moderate Kosovo Serb political and religious leaders are becoming more confident about criticizing Belgrade and stating their own independent positions. They recognize the need for pragmatism in light of a looming status declaration. The church leaders at Decani are taking a realistic view of the minimal concessions they need to ensure the long term survival of Serb religious communities in Kosovo. Ivanovic's new Kosovo-based political party is a positive development, though a small one, which has some potential to unite those Serbs who want to stay and help them integrate into post-status Kosovo. END COMMENT.

¶10. (U) Post clears this message in its entirety for release to Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari.

KAIDANOW